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AUTHOR Richards, Jack C.
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ABSTRACT

Despite the impact of communicative approaches to language teaching methodology, most of the world's second language learners continue to learn from materials in which organization and presentation are grammatically based. Language testing research has contributed greatly to understanding the role of grammar in language proficiency. This research finds that grammar is not an organizing principle of communication but an important component whose importance varies according to the learner's communicative task. Studies on the invariant order of grammatical development, delayed grammatical development, and variable use of rules in second language learning have also shed light on the nature of language proficiency, supporting the notion that grammar is a necessary but not a sufficient component of language proficiency. A theory of grammar or of grammatical development cannot provide the entire basis for a proficiency-oriented curriculum. A goal of second language education research is to develop a proficiency-oriented curriculum in which grammatical skills are viewed as components of specific kinds of proficiency. For example, in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines, grammar is defined more positively, in terms of specific but restricted skill levels, not in terms of deficiencies in performance. This approach provides criteria for developing, grading, and evaluating communicative tasks and activities in curriculum development. (MSE)

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The Status of Grammar in the Language Curriculum*

JACK C. RICHARDS

Introduction

Grammar has traditionally had a central role in language teaching. Particular theories of grammar and theories of learning associated with them have provided justifications for syllabuses and methodology in language teaching for thousands of years. Despite the impact of communicative approaches to methodology in recent years, the bulk of the world's second and foreign language learners continue to learn from materials in which the principles of organization and presentation are grammatically based. In this paper we will review the status of grammar in language teaching by considering how grammatical knowledge and grammatical skill contributes to language proficiency. In the first part of the paper we consider grammar from the perspective of language proficiency. In part two we will consider the relationship of grammar to proficiency in the light of second language acquisition research. In the third part of the paper we will consider consequences for language curriculum development.

What Does It Mean to Know a Language? Grammatical Competence, Communicative Competence, and Language Proficiency

Our view of the status of grammar in language teaching will reflect our understanding of the role of grammar in language use. This in turn will depend upon whether we adopt a linguistic, sociolinguistic, or psycholinguistic perspective on language.

Grammatical Competence

The linguistic perspective is seen in the concept of grammatical

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competence, as proposed by Chomsky in his writings in the 1950s and sixties. At that time, knowing a language was equated with knowing the grammar of the language. Grammatical competence was the knowledge underlying our ability to produce and understand sentences in a language. We call upon our grammatical competence to express meanings in ways which are native-like in the target language. At times, we may be prevented from applying our grammatical competence, through fatigue, distractions or other aspects of "performance". The theory of transformational grammar captured our ability to realize propositions in sentence structure through rules for the construction of words, phrases and clauses, through the choice of grammatical categories such as subject, predicate, and complement, and through grammatical processes such as ellipsis, pronominalization, re-ordering and transformation.

Communicative Competence

The sociolinguistic perspective is seen in the concept of communicative competence (Hymes 1972). Hymes pointed out that in addition to our knowledge of rules of grammar, knowing a language entails knowing how to use it for social and communicative interaction, i.e.,

> knowing when it is appropriate to open a conversation and how, what topics are appropriate to particular speech events, which forms of address are to be used, to whom and in which situations, and how such speech acts as greetings, compliments, apologies, invitations and complements are to be given, interpreted and responded to
>
> (Wolfson 1983:61).

Hymes used the term "communicative competence" to refer to knowledge both of rules of grammar, vocabulary, and semantics, and "rules of speaking" — the patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour of the speech community. Neither the concepts of grammatical competence or communicative competence however describe how such "competence" is used in actual communication, and for this a psycholinguistic or performance-oriented perspective is needed. For this we will consider the concept of language proficiency.

Language Proficiency

The notion of language proficiency is fundamental in language program design, language teaching, and language testing. It refers to the degree of skill with which a second or foreign language is used in carrying out different communicative tasks in the target language. Farhady comments

> Language proficiency is one of the most poorly defined concepts in the field of language testing. Nevertheless, in spite of differing theoretical views as to its definition, a general issue on which many scholars seem to agree is that the focus of proficiency tests is on the student's ability to use language
>
> (Farhady 1982: 44)

Clark suggests that proficiency is the learner's ability

> ...to use language for real-life purposes without regard to the manner in which that competence was acquired. Thus, in proficiency testing, the frame of reference ... shifts from the classroom to the actual situation in which the language is used.
>
> (1972:5)

The concept of language proficiency differs from the concepts of grammatical or communicative competence in several important ways.

(1) It is defined not with reference to "knowledge", or "competence", but with reference to performance, that is, to how language is used.

(2) It is defined with reference to specific situations, purposes, tasks, and communicative activities, such as using conversation for face to face social interaction, listening to a lecture, or reading a university textbook.

(3) It refers to a level of skill at carrying out a task, that is, to the notion of effectiveness. Thus it has associated with it the concept of a criterion which can be used to evaluate the degree of skill with which a task is performed.

(4) It refers to the ability to call upon a variety of component subskills (i.e., to select different aspects of grammatical and communicative competence) in order to perform different kinds of tasks at different levels of effectiveness.[1]

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To determine the status of grammar within the language curriculum it is necessary to consider how grammatical knowledge contributes to language proficiency. Work in language proficiency testing provides useful insights in this area.

In the Foreign Service Institute oral proficiency scale, or FSI scale, which has been in widespread use in American government agencies as an instrument for assessing the oral proficiency of government employees, three component skills are assessed in determining a person's level of language proficiency. These are referred to as Functions (i.e., functional ability), Content (i.e., topics expressed and understood and vocabulary knowledge) and Accuracy (i.e., grammar and pronunciation). However those who work with the FSI scale have emphasized that the contribution of different component skills varies according to the learner's level of proficiency (Higgs and Clifford 1982).

The Foreign Service Institute Oral Interview Test of speaking proficiency takes five factors into account in determining a person's speaking proficiency; accent, comprehension, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary. But the factors which contribute most to a given level on the FSI scale vary. A study by Adams (1980) demonstrates the difference between proficiency levels in terms of factors which contribute to average performance at each level (see Table 1).

Within a given proficiency level, tasks may also vary according to the type of subskills they involve. For some tasks the need for phonological and grammatical accuracy may be high (e.g., explaining to someone how a piece of equipment works), and in others it may be relatively low (e.g., shopping in a supermarket; ordering a meal in a fast food store). The same task may be performed at different criterion levels. For example a speaking task such as "giving directions" may be performed with a primary focus on Content — "You go — this street — King street — two block — you turning — Bright street", or with a focus both on Content and Accuracy — "First you follow King street for two blocks. Then you turn into Bright street". The way a task is accomplished will also vary according to the audience. Thus we might recount an incident such as a traffic accident in one way, when giving an account of it to a policeman, and in another way when retelling it to a friend.

Language testing research — particularly research in language proficiency testing — has hence contributed a great deal to our

Table 1. The Most Discriminating Factors in the FSI Oral Interview Test (Adams 1980)

Level	Factors in descending order of significance
0+ – 1	Vocabulary
1 – 1+	Fluency Comprehension Grammar Vocabulary
1+ –2	Comprehension Grammar Accent Fluency
2 – 2+	Fluency Comprehension Accent Vocabulary
2+ –3	Grammar Accent Vocabulary Comprehension
3 – 3+	Comprehension Fluency Grammar
3+ – 4	Vocabulary Accent Grammar
4 – 4+	Grammar Vocabulary

understanding of the role of grammar within language proficiency. Grammar is seen not as something which is the central organizing principle of communication, but rather as an important component of communication. It's importance, however, varies according to the type of communicative task the learner is performing, and according to the learner's level of proficiency. It is not simply the case that "more grammar = more proficient", but that grammar skills interact with other language skills and together determine what the learner can do at any given level of proficiency, and how well he or she can do it.

Another complementary source of information is available on the nature of language proficiency and the role of grammatical skills within it, namely second language acquisition research. It is to this to which we now turn.

Second Language Acquisition and Language Proficiency

A considerable amount of research has been conducted into different aspects of second language acquisition in the last ten years (e.g., Felix 1980, Anderson 1983, Hatch 1980, 1983). Although much of this research has not investigated the development of language proficiency directly, much can be inferred about the nature of language proficiency from the results of SLA research. Three issues arising out of this research seem particularly relevant in the context of the present discussion, namely the invariant order of grammatical development, delayed grammatical development, and variable use of rules.

Invariant Order of Development

One of the first important findings of SLA research was the discovery that L2 learners passed through clearly identifiable stages in the acquisition of the grammar of the target language. These include;

(a) use of do-support in Yes/No questions before Wh-questions; i.e., *Does he come?* before *What he did?* (Ravem 1974).

(b) In Wh-questions, a stage in which the wh-words occur in sentence initial position with the rest of the sentence in statement rather than inverted form; *How he can do it?; What she is doing?* (Ravem 1974).

Dulay and Burt (1974), present evidence suggesting a high

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degree of agreement between the order in which ESL learners acquired grammatical morphemes and that observed in L1 learners, although the two orders were not identical, as the following table shows:

Table 2 . Order of Development of Grammatical Morphemes in L1 and L2 Learners (Dulay and Burt 1974)

First language learners	Second language learners
1. plural (s)	1. plural (s)
2. progressive (ing)	2. progressive (ing)
3. past irregular	3. contractible copula
4. articles (a,the)	4. contractible auxiliary
5. contractible copula	5. articles (a,the)
6. possessive	6. past irregular
7. 3rd person singular (s)	7. 3rd person singular (s)
8. contractible auxiliary	8. possessive (s)

Although there is ongoing debate into aspects of the invariant order hypothesis (e.g., concerning the nature of individual variation in development, the effects of naturalistic versus formal contexts on developmental orders, the influence of the mother tongue, and the effects of input features; cf Wode 1981; Clahsen 1983; Pienemann 1983; Pica 1982) there is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that second language learners do indeed pass through stages in the acquisition of grammatical features and that these developmental stages are similar for learners of different language backgrounds. These developmental orders are typically taken as evidence to support the claim that second language learning is a "creative construction process" in which learners construct their own interlanguage systems. "The observed morpheme order is the result of the underlying process of acquisition" (Krashen 1982:61). The fact of an invariant or naturalistic order for the development of grammatical morphemes (if indeed it is a fact) however, is in itself of little significance, unless it can be related to a theory of the development

of language proficiency. Givon's account of the differences between pragmatic and syntactic modes of communication can be used to relate the empirical findings of the morpheme studies to a proficiency oriented view of second language acquisition (Givon 1979).[3]

Using data taken from studies of differences between Child-Adult, Pidgin-Creole, and Informal (i.e., unplanned) — Formal (planned) speech, Givon argues that in learning a language we acquire two modes of communication. One, termed the Pragmatic Mode, is a system of communication in which functions, topics, vocabulary and word order are the primary organizing mechanisms. This is seen in child language, in pidgins, and in unplanned informal speech. The other, which Givon terms the Syntactic Mode, is characteristic of adult language, creoles, and formal speech. Givon illustrates some of the differences between these two modes of communication (see Table 3).

Givon argues that syntax arises out of the pragmatic mode. As language learning or language development proceeds, loose pragmatic structure develops into tighter syntactic structure, with morphology and syntax developing to better code emerging semantic and pragmatic distinctions. Reliance on a primarily pragmatic mode of communication is proposed as the normal initial stage in language acquisition. From this perspective the natural order for the development of English morphology seen in SLA studies can be interpreted as reflecting the movement from the pragmatic to the syntactic mode (see particularly Givon's level [f] above). The naturalistic emergence of grammatical competence which the morpheme studies demonstrate, can thus be interpreted as evidence of a gradual refining of the learner's capacities to package communicative meanings and intentions.

The significance of Givon's work for SLA research has been acknowledged by several SLA researchers and a number of studies have been undertaken to test out whether Givon's claims hold true for second language acquisition (Schumann 1979; 1980; 1981; Sato 1984). It may well be that the particular features Givon attributes to the pragmatic and syntactic modes will have to be modified in the light of such research, although the basic claim of the theory appears to hold. Language proficiency is hence seen to involve two basic modes of development, although as other SLA studies have demonst...ted, the two do not necessarily develop at the same rate.

Table 3. Differences between Pragmatic and Syntactic Modes (Givon 1979)

Pragmatic Mode	Syntactic Mode
a. Topic-comment structure	Subject-predicate structure
b. Loose conjunction	Tight subordination
c. Slow rate of delivery (under several intonation contours)	Fast rate of delivery (under a single intonational contour)
d. Word-order is governed mostly by one pragmatic principle; old information goes first, new information follows	Word-order is used to signal semantic case-functions (though it may also be used to indicate pragmatic-topicality relations)
A elarger ratio of nouns-over-verbs-to-nouns in discourse with the verbs being semantically simple	Roughly one-to-one ratio of verbs in discourse, with the verbs being semantically complex
f. No use of grammatical morpology	Elaborate use of grammatical morphology
g. Prominent intonation-stress marks the focus of new information; topic intonation is less prominent	Very much the same, but perhaps not exhibiting as high a functional load, and at least in some languages totally absent.

Delayed Grammatical Development

Although second language learners may evidence an invariant order for the acquisition of certain grammatical features of the target language, for many language learners, acquisition does not lead to gradual mastery of all of the features of the target language. Many learners, despite prolonged contact with and use of English, fail to show further development for many areas of grammar beyond an initial level of proficiency, despite developing greater control in other areas of communicative competence. Schmidt (1983, 1984) for example, presents a case study of an adult ESL learner resident in an

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English speaking community who makes extensive use of English for social and professional purposes. But the learner displays remarkably little progress across a five-year period of observation in acquiring nine grammatical morphemes, as seen in the following table:

Table 4. Accuracy Order for Nine Grammatical Morphemes in Obligatory Contexts (Schmidt 1983)

	July 1978	November 1980	June 1983
Copula BE	95%	94%	84%
Progressive ING	92%	90%	90%
Auxiliary BE	91%	89%	85%
Past Irregular	25%	55%	51%
Plural	5%	32%	21%
3rd singular -s	0%	21%	24%
Article	0%	6%	2%
Possessive -s	0%	8%	10%
Past regular	0%	0%	0%

Higgs and Clifford (1982) document a similar phenomenon in describing typical performance of students taking intensive foreign language courses at the Defence Language Institute. Many students in such programs are unable to progress beyond a rating of 2 or 2+ on the FSI scale (the "terminal 2 syndrome" as the authors describe it) and lack sufficient control of the grammatical component of language proficiency to obtain a higher rating, despite intensive instruction. They may have a reasonable control of topics and vocabulary (indeed they may be rated 3+ or 4 on these dimensions) but are weak on grammatical accuracy.

> This pattern of high vocabulary and low grammar is a classic profile for a terminal 2/2+. In fact, the terminal [2/2+ profile]....is encountered all too frequently in government screening programs. It is important to note that the grammar weaknesses that are typically found in this profile are not *missing* gram-

> matical patterns which the student could learn or acquire later on, but are *fossilized* incorrect patterns. Experience has shown again and again that such patterns are not remediable, even in intensive language training programs or additional in-country living experience.
>
> (Higgs and Clifford 1982:67)

Schumann (1978) provides further data on a subject who failed to make progress in grammar. Schumann studied six learners over a ten-month period and found that one learner

> showed very little linguistic development during the course of the study. Four stages were found in the acquisition of the English negative, no V, don't V, aux-neg, analyzed don't; throughout the study Alberto remained in the first stage. Two stages were found in the acquisition of English wh-questions; throughout the study Alberto remained in the first period of the first stage.
>
> (Schumann 1978: 65)

In the light of the distinction between pragmatic and syntactic modes of communication, cases such as these may be interpreted as situations where learners develop proficiency in the pragmatic mode at the expense of the syntactic mode of communication. Schumann (1978) offers a socio-psychological explanation to account for non-acquisition of the syntactic mode, in terms of his acculturation theory. Schumann attributes his subject's lack of grammatical development to the learner's social and psychological distance from the speakers of the target language and to the fact that his pidginized speech was sufficient for his restricted communicative needs. Schmidt's study however does not support Schumann's acculturation theory, since his subject was well acculturated. Despite extensive use of English for social and personal purposes, however, the subject's grammatical development remained very limited. Higgs and Clifford propose that the reasons for the terminal 2 syndrome encountered in many US government language programs is that in many foreign language programs where there is an initial emphasis on communication, and in particular comprehensible communication, learners' production or output demands in the target language may soon outstrip their grammatical competence, resulting in

learners who are successful but grammatically inaccurate communicators. There may be too few demands within the curriculum for use of the syntactic mode. In addition there is often little focus on grammatical accuracy in such programs.

Schmidt's study is a test case for a different form of validation of Givon's theory, however, since Schmidt's subject used English exclusively for speaking and listening.[3] He had virtually no contact with written modes of communication. Now it could well be the case that acquisition of the syntactic mode is dependent upon use of other than oral modes of communication. Many of the linguistic features of the syntactic mode cited by Givon (e.g., passivization, use of relative clauses, subordination in the verb phrase, use of complex verbs, complex genitive constructions) are features more characteristic or more frequent in written than spoken discourse. Hence it could be that lack of contact with the written mode (either in reading or writing) will lead to retarded development along the syntactic parameter. The converse is presumably also possible, where a learner would be exposed primarily to the syntactic mode and evidence considerable development along the syntactic parameter, but be severely restricted in use of the pragmatic mode, i.e., be unable to maintain conversational discourse.

Another important issue arises from cases of retarded grammatical development, such as those studied by Schmidt and Schumann. Such cases demonstrate that the degree of development or non-development along a grammatical continuum cannot be taken as evidence of a level of language proficiency. As Schmidt has shown, a learner may have attained a considerable degree of communicative or pragmatic proficiency despite lack of progress in the grammatical domain. An index of grammatical development is not therefore necessarily an index of language proficiency, despite the attempt by some SLA researchers to see these as one and the same thing (cf Larsen — Freeman 1978). The Schumann, Schmidt, and Higgs and Clifford cases can therefore be used to reject proposals such as those of Clahsen (1983), who makes use of information concerning only grammatical and morphological development to assess general language proficiency. While language proficiency at the highest levels includes control of morphology and syntax, the different components of proficiency may develop relatively independently in certain circumstances and nothing can necessarily be

inferred about one (e.g., the pragmatic mode) from the state of development or retardation of the other (e.g., the syntactic).

Variable Use of Rules

Another phenomenon documented in studies of second and foreign language learning which adds further to our understanding of language proficiency is that of variability in the use or application of rules which learners apparently "know". An individual may demonstrate accurate use of a particular feature of grammar or phonology in one situation (e.g., telling a story) but not in another (e.g., informal conversation). Dickerson and Dickerson (1977) and others (Tarone 1983; Sato 1984) have shown that this type of variation is systematic; the use of target language features varies systematically according to the situation or context for its use. LoCoco (1976) compared the performance of learners in three different situations and found significant differences in the number of grammatical errors occurring in each situation and also in the degree to which transfer and overgeneralization errors occurred. As Tarone observes, "the linguistic and phonological characteristics of Interlanguage change as the situation changes" (Tarone 1979:183).

There are several explanations available for the variability evidenced in the use of aspects of the second language learner's interlanguage phonology and syntax. Tarone (1984) and others (Tarone 1979; Dickerson 1977; Sato 1983) have illustrated the effect of task on the use of interlanguage rules. Performance on different kinds of tasks (e.g., reading aloud from a word list, telling a story, free conversation, an interview, a written grammar test, an oral grammar test), may vary because the amount of attention to phonological and grammatical accuracy, that is, to language form, differs across task conditions. (Tarone 1984 emphasizes that this is not the only variable however.) Some tasks require little attention to language form (e.g., informal conversation) while others require a great deal (e.g., a writing task) and this affects both the kind of target language forms used, and also the degree to which certain forms are used. This is also predicted by Givon's theory, since the differences between formal (i.e., planned) and casual (i.e., unplanned) speech is another example of a difference between the pragmatic and syntactic modes of communication, both of which have their own distinctive grammatical and phonological characteristics.

Krashen's Monitor Theory (Krashen 1981, 1982) would attribute variation according to task to differences between conditions for the application or non-application of the "monitor". Tasks vary according to the presence or absence of features necessary for the application of the monitor (e.g., the amount of time available, or the degree to which a focus on accuracy is present; however see Gregg 1984). McLaughlin's discussion of differences between controlled and automatic processing is an additional dimension of (McLaughlin, Rossman and McLeod 1983). According to the theory of controlled versus automatic processing, learning any complex task requires the integration of a number of sub-skills. In order to be able to handle recurring tasks more efficiently, many of the underlying skills become automatic and are then generally performed without conscious attention. This is referred to as "automatic processing". In learning a new task, subskills which are not yet part of automatic processing may initially require conscious attention. They are under the domain of "conscious processing" at this stage. This may lead to an intrusion onto the ability to simultaneously perform other aspects of the task, which can lead to the learner's control of grammar being affected. Gradually, controlled processes become automatic as the learner gains proficiency in the task.

Research on variation in interlanguage syntax and the effects of task on use of component subskills thus complements the definition of proficiency given in part one of this paper, and provides further evidence of how the different components of proficiency assume different degrees of significance according to the nature of a communicative task.

Curriculum Implications

We have seen that both the literature on language proficiency testing as well as research on second language acquisition support the notion that grammar is a necessary but not sufficient component of language proficiency. The proper context for discussing the role of grammatical and other skills in the curriculum is hence through reference to a theory of language proficiency, such as we have attempted to present above. A theory of grammar or of grammatical development cannot provide a starting point for a proficiency oriented curriculum, though such a curriculum must acknowledge the role of grammatical skills within different kinds and levels of

proficiency. In developing a proficiency-oriented curriculum therefore our goal is to develop a curriculum in which grammatical skills are viewed as components of specific kinds of proficiency. Guidelines for the development of such curriculum models are currently being developed in large scale language programs.

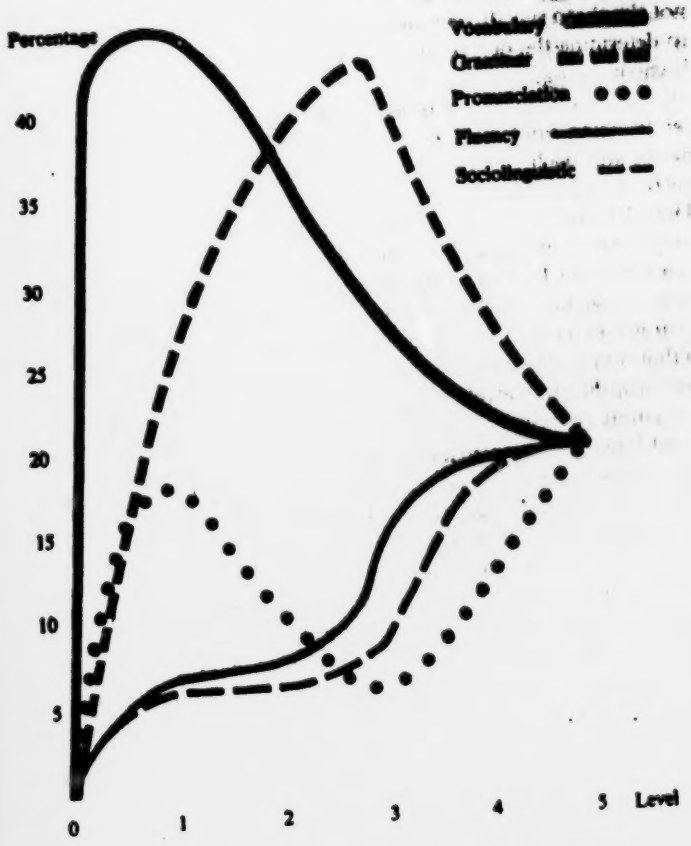
One such example is that of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines which are specifications of nine levels of language proficiency, for speaking, listening, reading, writing and culture (Higgs 1984), intended as general guidelines for the development of foreign language programs in the United States. Within each proficiency level, the expected performance outcomes are specified in terms of subskills related to Functions, Content and Accuracy. A similar approach has been adopted in the design of on-arrival programs for immigrants in Australia. Ingram comments:

> In order to ensure that a language program is coherent and systematically moves learners along the path towards that level of proficiency they require, some overall perspective of the developmental path is required. This need resulted ... in the development of the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLRP). The ASLRP defines levels of second language proficiency at nine (potentially twelve) points along the path from zero to native-like proficiency. The definitions provide detailed descriptions of language behaviour in all four macroskills and allows the syllabus developer to perceive how a course at any level fits into the total pattern of proficiency development.
>
> Ingram 1982:66)

For each type of communicative task the learner is expected to accomplish (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing) the proficiency descriptions should describe the criterion which must be attained. As Higgs and Clifford point out in defending such a proposal:

> If the goal of the curriculum is to produce Level 3 speakers of a language, then the concentration on language subskills in the curriculum should be representative of their relative importance in performing Level 3 Tasks. Grammar skills would be an important part of the curriculum. If the goal is to produce students with Level 1 survival skills, then the optimum curriculum mix would be entirely different, with a primary emphasis on the teaching and practice of vocabulary.
>
> (Higgs and Clifford 1982:73)

Higgs and Clifford represent the (hypothetical) relative contribution of different subskills, including grammar skills, at different levels of proficiency, in the following Figure:



Hypothesized Relative Contribution of Different Components of Proficiency According to Level (from Higgs and Clifford 1982)

However proficiency levels intended for use in curriculum planning will differ somewhat from those intended for use in language proficiency assessment, since the latter are typically defined negatively in terms of deficiencies in performance. Proficiency guidelines for use in curriculum planning need to be defined positively in terms of specific but restricted levels of skill. This is not always the case with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The use of proficiency levels in language program development are hence an attempt not simply to specify communicative goals within the curriculum but to determine the degree of effectiveness with which communication is carried out.

The use of graded objectives in curriculum development currently being implemented in several countries represents an alternative approach to relating grammatical and other skills to levels of performance on specific tasks (Page et al. 1982: Buckby et al. 1981). These are typically defined not in terms of how a native speaker would carry out a task, but how a second or foreign language learner at a particular level of proficiency, can carry out a task. Both proficiency guidelines and graded objectives differ in conception from what is commonly understood by objectives in curriculum planning, in that they can be derived empirically from studies of learner performance at different levels of achievement (cf Brindley 1982). They do not simply represent the planners' or applied linguist's view of how target language performance is carried out.

How is the status of grammar in the curriculum effected by a shift from "competence" to "performance" as the guiding principle of language curriculum development? If the claims of Higgs and Clifford (1982) are accepted, grammatical accuracy is a fundamental component of lower levels of proficiency for many communicative tasks. If accuracy is delayed to promote comprehensible output, they suggest, learners may not be able to move beyond the level of proficiency currently represented by the Level 2 descriptions on the FSL scale. The pragmatic mode will develop at the expense of the syntactic mode. This is not to advocate a return to grammatical syllabuses or grammar drills, since a focus on grammar in itself is an invalid way to approach the development of language proficiency. Rather, tasks and activities selected for use at different levels of proficiency should reflect the degree of importance attributed to grammatical accuracy at that level. Furthermore, by a focus on grammatical ac-

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curacy we refer to pedagogic tasks and learning experiences that allow for the development of monitoring, revision or editing capacities, i.e., in which grammatical accuracy is the realization of a communicative process, rather than activities which focus on the study of grammar for its own sake.

Viewing grammatical skills as a component of language proficiency rather than as an end in themselves highlights the inadequacies of many language syllabus currently in use in Southeast Asia. The concept of proficiency is hardly acknowledged at all in many national syllabuses for the teaching of English, and differences between the syllabuses for first, second or third year English programs are typically expressed simply in terms of content differences, the content being defined exclusively in grammatical terms. Even where attempts have been made to focus on communicative outcomes rather than grammatical content (e.g., as in the Malaysian Communications Syllabus), the level at which syllabus tasks are to be performed is not specified. Neither the teacher nor course designer is given guidelines as to what aspects of proficiency (accent, fluency, accuracy, vocabulary etc.) are considered most crucial in order to perform the syllabus tasks. A similar objection could be made to proposals for "process-based" syllabuses (cf Terrell 1977; Prabhu 1983). It is possible to organize a language program around interactive and communicative tasks and activities, selecting tasks according to how they are presumed to engage specific language acquisition processes. But if these are developed independently of graded proficiency descriptions (i.e., without reference to a theory of output), we have no criteria for developing, grading, and evaluating tasks. Proficiency descriptions thus allow for accountability within the curriculum development process.

To return to the theme with which this paper opened, we can say in conclusion that grammar still has a central role in language teaching. However its role is derived from the kinds of proficiencies we plan as the outcomes of the language curriculum.

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NOTES

1. Cf. Canale (1983), who distinguishes between grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence, all of which constitute communicative competence.
2. Givon makes no such connection himself; this is my own interpretation.
3. Again, in what follows I am interpreting Givon in the light of my discussion of proficiency.

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